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RECOGNIZING THE 67TH ANNIVERSARY OF ISRAEL'S INDEPENDENCE

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 23, 2015

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the 67th anniversary of the founding of the modern State of Israel and to reaffirm the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the United States and Israel.

Israel was created in 1948; it took President Truman only 11 minutes to recognize the new Jewish State.

Since then, Israel has come to exist as the only true democracy in the Middle East.

Israel and the United States have many of the same foundations of government: freedom of religion, free speech, basic human rights, the rule of law and being a nation of immigration and diversity.

In addition, it is a home to many religious sites which are sacred to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and attracts multitudes of visitors every year.

Israel provided a refuge to Jews who survived the horrors of the Holocaust and the evils committed by the Nazis which were unprecedented in human history.

The people of Israel have established a unique, pluralistic democracy which includes the freedoms cherished by the people of the United States, including freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of association, freedom of the press, and government by the consent of the governed.

Israel continues to serve as an example of democratic values by regularly holding free and fair elections, promoting the free exchange of ideas, and vigorously exercising in its Parliament, the Knesset, a democratic government that is fully representative of its citizens.

I applaud the Government of Israel for successfully working with the neighboring Governments of Egypt and Jordan to establish peaceful, bilateral relations.

I have had the privilege of visiting Israel many times, and observing firsthand her great achievements in the areas of medical research, technology, business, and the arts.

Mr. Speaker, the 67th anniversary of the founding of the modern State of Israel is an occasion for us to reflect and reaffirm the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the United States and Israel.

The United States and Israel enjoy a strategic partnership based on shared mutual democratic values, friendship, and respect.

The people of the United States share affinity with the people of Israel and view Israel as a strong and trusted ally.

I hope this friendship continues to grow and blossom for decades to come.

THE INTRODUCTION OF A BILL TO ENSURE THAT THE METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON AIRPORTS AUTHORITY COMPLIES WITH FEDERAL AUDITING STANDARDS

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 23, 2015

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a bill to prohibit federal funds from the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) from being disbursed to the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA) unless DOT certifies that MWAA is complying with audit standards. There have been some improvements at MWAA, but significant failures in MWAA's contracting, auditing, and hiring policies and practices pointed to a need for systemic reform in MWAA's acquisition, auditing, and hiring processes. Despite being created by Congress, leasing federally owned land, and benefiting from significant federal taxpayer funds, MWAA is not subject to federal procurement, auditing or nepotism laws. However, MWAA has been taking steps to address these shortcomings.

MWAA is an independent public body created by Congress under the Metropolitan Washington Airports Act of 1986 (Airports Act). MWAA, with 1,400 employees, leases Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and Washington Dulles International Airport from the federal government. In addition to managing the airports, MWAA is responsible for the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project, which has an estimated cost of \$5.8 billion, including \$977 million in federal funds. In 2012, DOT appointed a Federal Accountability Officer, who reports directly to the Secretary, to ensure MWAA follows the DOT Inspector General's (IG) recommendations.

A 2012 DOT IG report, "MWAA's Weak Policies and Procedures Have Led to Questionable Procurement Practices, Mismanagement, and a Lack of Overall Accountability" (Report Number: AV-2013-006) (IG Report), found that "MWAA's contracting policies and practices are insufficient to ensure compliance with the Airports Act and the lease agreement between DOT and MWAA." For example, the Airports Act and lease agreement require MWAA to award contracts over \$200,000 competitively to the maximum extent practicable. However, the IG Report found that MWAA had recently awarded two-thirds of its contracts exceeding \$200,000 with limited competition. The IG Report also noted that MWAA awarded many contracts with no formal solicitation. After the IG Report, MWAA immediately took action and has closed out 10 of 12 recommendations and MWAA has adopted as much of the Federal Acquisition Regulations as are applicable to MWAA. Still, there are significant issues sighted in a recent draft DOT IG report on the Office of Audits that virtually mandates greater monitoring.

A January 15, 2013, Washington Post article reported that at least 10 percent of MWAA employees have family members working there, including spouses and children. The IG report also noted that MWAA lacked "sufficient controls to detect and prevent nepotism." It is clear that changes were imperative and overdue. The lack of transparency and competition on MWAA's contracts and hiring were incon-

sistent with continued ownership of the airports by the federal government, MWAA's creation by Congress, and the significant federal taxpayer dollars MWAA receives. The IG Report's conclusion that procurement procedures and hiring policies in place were inadequate required a response that definitively fixed these issues. MWAA has updated its policies, and nepotism appears to no longer be a problem.

A current draft DOT IG report on the Office of Audits raises a number of questions regarding MWAA's internal auditing procedures. It finds that there have been no outside reviews of the Office of Audits and that the office has not adopted standards and lacked sufficient oversight. MWAA has responded to this draft report by taking initial steps to restructure the office. MWAA has updated its regulations so that the head of the Office of Audits will now report directly to the Board of Directors as well as the President & CEO. MWAA has also adopted the Institute of Internal Auditors standards, and it is undergoing a national search for a new internal auditor and external auditor.

The steps MWAA has taken to address the findings of the DOT IG are commendable. However, considering the outstanding issues, continuous oversight is essential. To further assist MWAA, I am offering this bill so that DOT will continue to have direct oversight over MWAA and access to audit materials.

I urge support of this bill.

ISRAEL'S 67TH INDEPENDENCE DAY

HON. ELIOT L. ENGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 23, 2015

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the people of Israel as Israel celebrates its 67th anniversary.

Since its establishment on May 14, 1948, Israel has proven itself to be a vibrant democracy, one that prioritizes innovation, liberal values and freedom. It is these shared principles that have created the unbreakable bond between the United States and Israel.

Throughout its existence, the Israeli people have faced grave threats from hostile neighbors, defending themselves bravely against repeated terrorist and military attacks. Despite these hardships the Israeli people have not wavered in their commitment to democracy and freedom and have thrived economically, politically, culturally.

The recent growth in anti-Semitic acts, including the attacks this year in Paris and Copenhagen, are a powerful reminder of why the world needs a safe haven for the Jewish people. Such threats to the Jewish Diaspora underscore the importance of Israel as its own protector, and the moral imperative for the United States to stand by her right to self-defense.

As we celebrate Israel's Independence Day, we also remember those who have fallen in service to their country. I am proud to stand here in celebration of the freedoms that Israel stands for and will continue to ensure that the U.S.-Israel relationship remains strong and bipartisan.